ONLINE SEARCHING PLATFORMS PREFERRED BY STUDENTS IN ACQUIRING INFORMATION FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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Abstract: Our life today is inseparable with technologies and information. People utilise the internet to access various information for different purposes like social, entertainment and knowledge. Students nowadays are highly depending on the technology to obtain information especially for academic purposes. Hence, it is crucial for them to determine which websites should they visit to obtain reliable and useful information. This study aims to identify online searching platforms that students prefer to use in conducting literature search for their assignments and to determine the level of students' awareness on the importance of gaining reliable sources from the worldwide webs for academic purposes. An online survey was conducted among 100 students of various bachelor's degree programmes from UiTM Cawangan Kelantan. Results showed students prefer using video sharing sites (YouTube, TikTok, SnapChat and etc.), social media sites and microblogs (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and etc.) over other "traditional" search engines like library online database and Google Scholar to search for various forms of information for the learning. In terms of awareness, majority of the respondents are aware that it is important for them to gain information from reliable resources that are available online by checking the original sources of information and its author credentials prior using and sharing it to others. The respondents also agree that they are rigid when choosing the sources of news and information for their studies. News and information from entertainment blogs and social media sites are certainly not their choice in conducting literature search for academic purposes.

Keywords: Online searching platforms, information, literature search, academic purposes, reliable sources

1.   Introduction

Online search is the process of searching for and retrieving requested information via a computer or any other networked devices from databases that are available on the Internet. The searching for information has become more universal with more alternatives available for the internet users. With the advancement of technology, internet users nowadays possess greater control on the part of the individual looking up for information and knowledge (Case & Given, 2016).

The life of people today is inseparable with technologies and information. People utilise the internet to access various news and information for different purposes like social, entertainment and knowledge. Students nowadays are highly depending on the technology to obtain information especially for academic purposes. Hence, it is crucial for them to determine which websites should they visit to obtain reliable and useful information. While the internet offers trillions forms of information to its users, there are also traps such as false and fake information from unreliable resources that the internet users might fall in. Unreliable online resources like personal blogs, online tabloids and out-of-dates materials offer information that are inaccurate and can be easily altered as they are mostly not supported by facts and evidence. Hence, it is essential for the students to be aware and alert of the reliability of websites they choose in conducting literature research for academic purposes.

Students nowadays can easily obtain information from the internet. However, this situation has posed them to the risks of getting information from unreliable sources which is inaccurate and cannot be used in completing their academic assignment given by their lecturers. Therefore, it is so vital that

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the students always equip themselves with appropriate skills and knowledge in the process of searching information from reliable online resources.

This study intents to identify what are the platforms that students prefer to use while conducting literature search for their academic assignments as well as to determine the level of students' awareness on the importance of gaining reliable sources from the worldwide webs for academic purposes. This study is beneficial for both students and lecturers because the findings obtained will provide useful data for both parties to have a clearer picture and better understanding on which platforms are preferred and frequently visited by the students when they need to conduct literature search in completing various assignments given by the lecturers. Moreover, it also helps the authors to understand the level of their awareness in obtaining information from reliable resources which lead to the accurate information searching technique and higher quality academic output.

2.   Previous Studies

The increased use of digital information resources has become common in the higher education system (Vrana, 2013) compared to traditional printed information resources that have been used for research and teaching at universities around the world for centuries since digital information resources are more convenient to access, easy to search, and downloadable (Wu & Chen, 2012).

Technology advancement has offered a lot of convenience and opportunities for people from different fields to explore the world-wide webs for various purposes. Websites and online databases are significant resources for students and academicians to identify various literature. The process of online literature searching involves several stages and techniques that typically require searching and browsing (reading and navigating) (Stansfield, Dickson & Bangpan, 2016). Websites have become a significant resource for most people nowadays to search for information especially for academic purposes. Hence, it is crucial to ensure the information obtained is transparent, accountable and reproducible (Stansfield, Dickson & Bangpan, 2016).

There are different effective information searching methods and channels available online which provide the opportunities for students to explore and fulfil their needs. A study done by Alphonce and Mwantimwa in 2015 exposed that internet resources have become the most preferred channel deployed by students than other resources such as CD-ROM, e-books, journals, slides and audio clips in conducting literature searching for the academics. The findings also reviewed several significant factors that encourage students to have higher level of preference to use the internet as their main source of literature searching of academic purposes. These factors include the wide range of online resources, 24/7 convenient access, the cost of internet services, limited searching competencies and limited subscribed databases inhibit effective and efficient usage of these by students. Hence, it is necessary for the university especially the library to provide structured instructions and guidance to the students to allow them to have hands-on practice in the use of online catalogues, electronic databases and Internet resources (Jelagat, 2016).

While the world of technology offers huge convenience to its users to obtain information the require, it is very important for the users, especially the students to be aware of the importance of obtaining reliable information only from trusted online resources. Students need to be given proper guidelines and training on the possible internet threats or risks they might encounter while conducting online searching. As future generation, students not only must be concerned about the reliability of any obtained information, they are also required to be aware of the need to verify any news before being shared or disseminated to others (Zulhilmi Abdullah et al., 2015).

3.   Methodology

An online survey was conducted among 100 students of various bachelor's degree programmes from UiTM Cawangan Kelantan. The students were selected using random sampling and convenient sampling techniques. The research used a quantitative approach to obtain the data of this study. In addition, an online survey was conducted by using Google form. Link to access the questionnaire were shared with the participants involved in this study via WhatsApp application from 1 October 2020 to 31 October 2020. The survey questions seek to identify online searching platforms preferred by students

in conducting literature search for their assignments and to determine the level of students' awareness on the importance of gaining reliable sources from the worldwide webs for academic purposes.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 *Online searching platforms preferred by university students in conducting literature search for academic purposes*

Table 4.1 shows various online searching platforms available online that students chose to use when they conduct literature search for academic purposes. Social networking sites and microblogs (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest etc.) have become the main channel of online searching platforms (87%) among the respondents. Besides, the respondents also showed interest in using video sharing sites (YouTube, TikTok, SnapChat etc.) while conducting online literature search to obtain information related to their studies. According to Fritz and Arlen (2010), the public nature, no cost and low access barrier of social media tools like YouTube and Facebook are very accessible for students to use and learn. They added, video sharing site like YouTube has provided an excellent delivery and distribution platform for students to enhance their learning process, while Facebook is used as an efficient tool that provides instant peer feedback and evaluation. These two online platforms offer great learning experience to their users in a more entertaining and interactive manners as compared to other "traditional" academic literature searching tools like the university's online database and Google Scholar. Moreover, the development of web search engines has provided an alternative for undergraduates to access the needed information for their studies without fully relying on library resources, especially reference sources (Oyewole & Alegbeleye, 2018).

Table 1: Online Searching Platforms Preferred by Students in Conducting Literature Search for Academic Purposes

Platforms	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
• UiTM Library Online Database	41	59
• Google Scholar	58	42
• Social networking sites and Microblogs (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest etc.)	90	10
• Video Sharing Sites (YouTube, TikTok, SnapChat etc.)	87	13
• Online Newspaper (The Star Online, NST online and etc)	63	37
• Online News Channels (ASTRO AWANI)	24	76

4.2 *Students' awareness on the importance of gaining reliable sources from the worldwide webs for academic purposes*

Table 4.2 portrays the level of awareness on the importance of gaining reliable sources from the worldwide webs for academic purposes among the respondents. Data shows majority of the respondents admitted that they are aware of the importance of obtaining related information only from the online searching platforms that are trusted and reliable. Majority of the respondents agree they always check the sources of information and the author credentials thoroughly before making decision to use the information for their assignments and share them with others. All of the respondents agree that it is crucial to be aware on the sources of information that they intend to obtain and use for academic purposes. New and information from personal blogs and entertainment pages are certainly not the choice for the respondents to use for academic purpose. This is because most of the students are well-trained by their respective lecturers on the process, procedure and ethics of academic literature searching. Shaharudin et al.'s (2015) research on the students' level awareness of information security through formal training program found that formal training given by respective trainers could improve student's awareness level towards the information security risk, threats and best practices.

Table 2: Students' Awareness on the Importance of Gaining Reliable Sources from the Worldwide Webs for Academic Purposes

	Percentage (%)			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

	1	4	21	74
• I always check the sources of information that I read or acquired from the internet.	1	4	21	74
• I always check the author credentials before using and sharing the information.	0	34	61	5
• I always ensure that the online information that I seek for is from the primary resource.	1	36	55	8
• I always check the source of the online information before sharing it to others.	3	15	26	36
• I do not acquire news and information from personal blogs and entertainment pages.	0	0	89	11
• I am aware that the sources of information from the internet are important.	0	0	12	88

5.   Conclusion

The development of various online searching platforms has provided an effective platform for the university students to access various information especially for academic purposes without fully dependent on "traditional" methods like library resources, especially reference sources. The public nature, no cost and low access barrier of social media tools like YouTube and Facebook are very accessible for students to use and learn (Fritz & Arlen, 2010). Despite the convenience and easy accessibility offered by these online searching platforms, it is very important for the university students not to neglect the reliability of the information they obtained online. Appropriate training and consultation services need to be provided to the university students to enhance their awareness on the importance of applying the correct techniques and ethics in conducting online literature search for their studies.

The findings of the study are hoped to offer benefits for both students and lecturers. It will create awareness on the importance of obtaining information from the reliable online sources among students. It also exposes the students to the accurate information searching technique to obtain good quality information for academic purposes. Next, the lecturers will be able to identify their students' trend and preferred channel in finding online information by referring to results obtained. These findings will assist them to expand their approach in the process of teaching and learning especially in terms of online information searching techniques of academic purposes.

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